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Strathcona Place Centre

Impact Study

July 1988

M.P. Ondrus

funded by

the Senior Citizens Secretariat

4.0 RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS

4.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

Data to permit inferences about the performance of Strathcona Place Centre were obtained from a telephone and mail survey. Data from the telephone survey appeared to be more representative of the overall population based on variables which could be compared to Strathcona Place Centre census records. A much higher response rate was obtained in the telephone survey which suggests that these data may be more representative. Many respondents who initially indicated they were unwilling to participate agreed to participate in the telephone survey once they were informed of the purpose of the study. Respondents to the mail survey appeared to be biased towards individuals who have a greater commitment to the Centre. Thus, it is less representative of the overall users of Strathcona Place Centre; as well, the mail questionnaires contain a greater proportion of missing data making generalizations to the overall population less reliable. We suggest that if this type of study is to be repeated, data should be gathered either through telephone or personal interview surveys.

4.2 PROGRAMS, ACTIVITIES AND SERVICES

The programs, activities and services at Strathcona Place Centre are well utilized by the current membership.

The lunch program is used to some extent by most members and serves over one third of members on a regular basis. A high level of satisfaction exists with respect to various aspects of the lunch program. The one area which may merit further attention is the appearance of the meals. Although not considered a problem, response to both surveys indicated the majority of people found the appearance of the meals "fairly appealing" as opposed to "very appealing". Wednesday evening meals are not as popular with Centre participants, but still serve almost 10% of the membership on a relatively regular basis (e.g. at least once a month).

According to the two surveys, approximately one half of the members participate in at least one course at Strathcona Place Centre. These courses tend to attract a slightly younger segment of the member population and those who participate in these courses may see this as the primary reason for their involvement with a seniors centre. This is suggested by the fact that fewer of these individuals also belong to other seniors centres than the overall membership of Strathcona Place Centre. In addition, the telephone survey reveals that only 26.2% of those individuals who take at least one course at Strathcona Place Centre also do volunteer work at the Centre.

Satisfaction with the volunteer instructors is high, and for the most part the facilities are viewed as good or adequate. In order to retain interest in courses at the Centre, it is recommended that suggestions from the membership be more actively solicited by the Board of Directors or by the Advisory Committee. Comments made in response to open ended questions about the courses and suggested improvements for the Centre, revealed a desire for new courses on the part of some members.

The telephone survey revealed that approximately two thirds of members are involved in at least one leisure or recreational activity. Nearly one half of members are involved in two leisure activites. The mail questionnaire suggested higher percentages of involvement in these activities, but this is attributable to the fact that females are over represented in the mail sample. The telephone survey indicated that two thirds of male members are involved in at least one leisure activity. Thus, leisure activities represent a broad membership appeal which is indicated by the fact that the characteristics of those who participate in the leisure activities are not significantly different from those of the general membership. That is to say, individuals who participate in the leisure or recreational activities do not represent a distinct subgroup of the overall member population.

The telephone survey indicated that health services are used by approximately 5% of the membership. This is in contrast to the nearly 40% of the members who feel the services provided by Strathcona Place Centre help to improve their general health. It is clear that many members recognize that participation in the Centre could be a positive

factor in their general "well being". The mail survey indicated higher usage of the health services, which is likely biased by the significantly higher proportion of the respondents who participate in Strathcona Place Centre.

* Financial and legal services are also used by approximately 5% of members, as revealed by the telephone survey. Many members contacted during the telephone survey were either unaware of these services or they had not had occasion to use them. However, they felt that these services were of great benefit to seniors. Again, more respondents indicated that they used the banking services in the mail survey. We recommend that information about these services be made more accessible and attention-getting.

Although only one fifth of the members use the Centre as an information bureau, members generally feel that Strathcona Place is a good place to go for information concerning matters of interest to seniors. The majority of members feel that Strathcona Place Centre is effective in representing the views of its members in matters of importance to seniors.

Members' self concepts are enhanced through participation in Strathcona Place Centre. This is reflected by the fact that most members feel that Strathcona Place Centre offers a very positive or a fairly positive image of seniors to other members of the community and to other seniors.

Casual use of Strathcona Place Centre is not as common as use of the Centre for scheduled activities. The most common use of the Centre on a casual basis is for the purpose of socializing either through dropping in for coffee, using the lounges to visit with friends or for bringing family members to the Centre. Use of the paperback library and large print books also attracts nearly one third of members. Members tend to report that they are unsure whether they should use the facilities for other than regularly scheduled activities. Efforts should be made during orientation to make it clear to new members that the Centre is for their continued use. Similarly, existing members should be encouraged to use the facilities on a casual basis. Posted schedules which indicate when facilities are reserved for regular activities and events might facilitate

more casual usage. Increased casual use of the facilities might optimize overall utilization of the Centre.

Most members use Strathcona Place Centre communications like the Monthly Activity Sheet or the posters, and News for Seniors which are available once they become members, to keep abreast of activities and events at the Centre. While this is effective for current members, it does little to attract new members to the Centre.

4.3 BENEFITS FROM PARTICIPATION IN STRATHCONA PLACE CENTRE

4.3.1 Food Services

Strathcona Place Centre pays particular attention to good nutritional value in the preparation and type of foods offered at their dining room. Because the lunch program is well used by members of the Centre, it can be concluded that the food service program at Strathcona Place Centre contributes to the enhanced nutrition of a significant number of its members.

When asked to identify how important a variety of reasons were in the decision to use the dining room at Strathcona Place Centre, members indicated that socialization, good value for their money and convenience were important reasons for eating lunch at the Centre.

4.3.2 Courses Offered at Strathcona Place Centre

Developing new skills and improving existing skills are considered important to a majority of members involved in the courses at the Centre. Approximately half the members involved in the courses identified socialization as an important factor. Increased exercise is less important as a consideration in deciding to take courses at Strathcona Place Centre. Comments made in response to the open ended questions indicated that a number of members enjoy having the opportunity to explore new areas through the courses offered at the Centre.

4.3.3 Leisure Activities

Socialization is the most readily identified reason for participation in leisure activities. Feeling that one has accomplished something useful with one's time is also an important reason for participating in the leisure activities. Increased exercise is important for those participants who engage in more active pursuits and a sense of competition is important to those involved in competitive activities.

4.3.4 Health Services

Many members, including those who do not directly use the health services, feel that Strathcona Place Centre helps to improve their general health. Many respondents mentioned increased "well being" because of participation in the Centre.

4.3.5 Financial Services

Although members do not heavily use the financial services, those who do indicate that convenience, ability to do one's own banking, feeling less rushed and reduced confusion are important reasons for using the banking services at Strathcona Place Centre.

4.3.6 Volunteerism

Member volunteers benefit from service to the Centre in different ways than non-member volunteers. Although both groups say that enjoyment of helping others is important, non-member volunteers are less interested in socialization benefits; member volunteers are more oriented towards keeping physically active, feeling good about one's self, keeping busy and filling time with meaningful activities.

4.3.7 Outreach

The Outreach Program was not investigated as part of this study. A separate study of the Outreach Program by another research group was being conducted at the time of this survey.

Many of the members of the Strathcona Place Centre discussed a concern for other seniors and mentioned the Outreach Program was an important service for seniors.

Overall, Strathcona Place Centre is effective in delivering the majority of the benefits it seeks to provide to its members. Many of the less readily quantified benefits such as self fulfillment, self actualization and a sense of achievement are difficult to measure and can only be inferred from the participation in the courses and activities.

4.4 THE FACILITIES AND PAID STAFF MEMBERS

When the Strathcona Place Centre was rebuilt in 1983, the intention was to design a facility that would provide a cheerful, homey atmosphere which would also meet the functional requirements of a multi-purpose seniors centre.

The Centre is successful in providing a cheerful, welcoming atmosphere. Large windows provide good natural lighting to most areas. Furnishings are generally comfortable and sufficiently attractive. A variety of hand crafted items decorate the walls and are used as window coverings in the auditorium. Changing art and craft exhibits contribute to a rich variety of visual enhancements. Staff are seen as readily accessible. This is achieved partially by the windowed walls for the Director and Assistant Directors' office which makes these individuals highly visible. It is also achieved by the open door policy for all offices. The results of both surveys indicated that most members find the atmosphere and arrangement of the dining room warm and inviting. Many respondents to both questionnaires, as well as individuals contacted casually, commented on the warmth and friendliness of the Centre. This is in part attributed to the attractive lobby and reception area. Upon entering the Centre, people are greeted by the sight of a table with coffee

and cookies, a small and welcoming lobby area and the well lighted reception desk and area. The vast majority of input received about the atmosphere created by the Centre, indicated that it provides an environment that makes members feel welcome and comfortable.

The art studio on the upper level provides excellent natural lighting and is conducive to the type of activity it was designed for. The weaving rooms on this level are also attractive and the wall windows allow visitors to the upstairs to observe the weaving in progress without feeling as though they are interrupting those who are working. As well,the woodworking facilities are well appointed and equipped.

The kitchen is modern and convenient. Efficient organization and layout of the servery makes serving meals to the dining room area convenient.

Areas which could be improved in terms of decor include the stairwell which provides access to the games area in the basement, and the ensuing hallway which leads to the games area and billiards room. The hallway is long, appears narrow and when individuals approach the downstairs games room via this hallway, they suddenly find themselves at the ping pong tables with no way to enter the area unobtrusively. This could be improved through the use of hand crafted items and signs in the stairwell and hallway. Rearrangement of the games area and use of portable dividers also could enhance the entrance to the games area.

In addition, the billiards room is not large enough to allow for proper use of the pool table. For example, pool cues have been modified to permit certain shots to be made. The billiards room tends not to attract individuals to enter, and does not accommodate spectators who wish to observe a game in progress. Although the width of the room cannot be altered, the lighting could be enhanced and the decor could be improved. Wall windows (with curtains should privacy be desired) would enhance the lighting and make the room appear more accessible. The other basement area which accommodates both woodworking and pottery could be enhanced by greater division of these two activities.

On the main level of the Centre, access to the cloakroom is difficult when large numbers of people are arriving at one time such as for special

events or meals. Investigation of possible structural modifications should be undertaken to see if access to this area could be improved.

A matter of considerable concern to a number of individuals is the issue of stair access to areas in the Centre. Although the Centre is designed for "well" seniors, many individuals have difficulty with stairs. A majority of the seniors interviewed during the telephone survey and contacted casually expressed concern for their fellow seniors. Many people who have no mobility difficulty expressed the concern that some people would be unable to participate in activities in areas of the Centre which can only be reached by stairs because of access problems. This suggests that whether or not access to parts of the Centre is actually a problem for many individuals, it is nevertheless perceived to be a problem by many. Although access to the dining room is possible by a very short set of stairs, it is difficult or impossible for people with walkers or wheel chairs. This is partially overcome by providing a table at the foot of the stairs; but a number of people viewed this as discriminatory, and felt that those individuals who could not make it up the stairs would feel uncomfortable and segregated by being seated at a table set off on its own. While it might require a small corner of the dining room, an investigation of ramp access should be undertaken. The stairs to the dining area and kitchen are also inconvenient when meals are served in the auditorium because the volunteer waiters and waitresses must go up and down stairs when serving to the auditorium level.

Many individuals expressed interest in determining if lift or elevator access to the upper level and down to the games room could be made possible both in terms of structural requirements and expense.

The problem of stairway access to various areas of the Centre also places limitations on the programming available to the Co-ordinator of Outreach. Many of the individuals who are served by the Outreach Program at Strathcona Place Centre are unable to use the stairs. This requires that group activities for Outreach must be conducted in the lounges or in the auditorium.

Parking facilities near the Centre, while adequate in number, are not generally convenient in terms of access. In order to leave the crescent parking spaces, individuals are required to back up to the lane beside the

Centre and then turn around or attempt to turn their vehicles in the small keyhole crescent. Although the Director of the Centre has identified 61 potential parking spaces near the Centre, it must be remembered that a number of apartment buildings are located in the area and many of these spots are frequently in use by area residents. When discussing parking, few members identified availability as a problem; although many identified ease of parking (and subsequent leaving) as a problem. It is recommended that the Centre approach the City of Edmonton to determine if modifications might be made to provide drive-through access to the Centre, perhaps with one way circulation, while still retaining the integrity of the adjacent green area.

The other issues of concern to some members were the small size of the area for their particular activity or having their regularly scheduled activities moved (e.g. out of the auditorium) for special events. It is recommended that scheduling of programs and activities be arranged to avoid these problems as much as possible or to identify them as far in the future as possible so members are readily aware of any alternative arrangements.

Staff members were largely perceived by the members as friendly and efficient. This was indicated both by the results of the direct questions on the two surveys and by many of the comments made in response to the open ended questions.

Informal discussions with each of the staff members revealed genuine concern and interest in the well being of the members of the Centre. When staff members were asked what they thought was the most important reason people might have for participating in Strathcona Place Centre, the most common response was for socialization and enjoyment of the company of others. Some of the staff members felt that people came primarily to enhance their well being through enjoyment of the Centre and satisfaction with their participation in the Centre. Recreation and "having fun" were also mentioned as important reasons for coming to the Centre. Many of the staff felt that the most important part of their job was interacting with seniors either to identify their needs, to act as a go between between the Centre and the members or simply to provide companionship when required. Most of the staff members felt that they

would like to join an organization like Strathcona Place Centre when they became "seniors". Problems the staff identified included constraints to the delivery of programs and services through a lack of adequate communication with management, a lack of support from management for some aspects of program delivery and poorly defined priorities. Other areas of concern included salary inequities, working late hours on Wednesday evenings (long day), and being unable to satisfy all of the people all of the time.

While staff interaction with Centre users is positive and enabling, it is important for staff to remember, that to a large extent, the Centre is intended to be managed and run by the members of the Strathcona Place Society. Staff should primarily provide continuity through changing Boards of Directors and co-ordination of volunteer activities. Many members currently see the Centre as a "provided" service rather than as an organization for seniors, by seniors. This is reflected by the fact that most members take suggestions for improvements or new programs or activities to staff members rather than to Board members. It is also reflected in the fact that many people who make inquiries to the Centre tend to ask to speak to a member of the staff. This may also be partially reflected by the figures concerning volunteerism by members at the Centre. From the telephone survey, it was indicated that 33% of members reported doing volunteer work at the Centre. The majority of these individuals were in the 71 to 75 year age group and had been volunteers at the Centre for 3 to 10 years (64.5%). It is important that staff keep in mind that their roles are that of facilitators rather than providers. New members to the Centre should be encouraged to become involved with Centre operations and should not feel they should rely on staff members to provide for all their needs.

4.5 AN OVERVIEW

Strathcona Place Centre offers a warm, friendly environment for seniors to enjoy the company of their peers. It offers activities valued by its users and promotes a sense of loyalty and "well being" amongst members who have been with the Centre for several years.

In order to continue to offer a high level of programming and services to its users, Strathcona Place Centre must be prepared to change with the changing population. Earlier retirement and growing numbers of seniors present a challenge to all organizations who offer services to mature adults.

The single greatest challenge for Strathcona Place Centre in the future is to retain its sense of caring for the individual and its sense of group cohesion while expanding its membership. While the results of this study indicate Strathcona Place Centre is successful in meeting the needs and desires of the current membership, the Board of Directors of Strathcona Place Society must choose wise courses of action for the continuation and growth of the Centre. This will require an assessment of the needs and desires of those who are not currently members of the Centre but who fit the target population, and an active pursuit of these individuals to become new members for the Centre.